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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 06 ANKARA 004503

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SUBJECT: TIP IN TURKEY: AUSTRALIAN INVESTIGATION REPORT I

REF: ANKARA 4502

(U) Classified by Polcounselor John Kunstadter; reasons: 1.4  
(b,d).

1. (C) The following confidential investigation report compiled by Australian Federal Police agent Shawn Selles includes names and contact information for suspected human smugglers described in reftel.

TURKISH-BASED PEOPLE SMUGGLING NETWORK OPERATING TO AUSTRALIA AND OTHER COUNTRIES

#### Background

Under a whole-of-government, approach to combat people smuggling to Australia, the Australian Government has funded a dedicated joint agency People Smuggling Strike Team (PSST) comprising both Australian Federal Police and Immigration officials. This team has an intelligence and investigation component and targets all aspects of organised people smuggling to Australia.

On 4 November 2003, an Indonesian fishing vessel "Minasa Bone 2" (designated Suspect Illegal Entry Vessel 14 - SIEV 14), arrived at Melville Island carrying 14 Turkish nationals and 4 Indonesian crew members on board. The 14 Turkish nationals had been attempting to illegally enter Australia. Operation SALVINI is the PSST investigation into the incident.

The PSST has identified a people smuggling network operating within Turkey and Indonesia with some Australian connections as being responsible for this venture. The aim of Operation SALVINI is to disrupt or dismantle this network.

The principal member, Mehmet SERIBAN, was arrested in March 2004 by the PSST and is currently before court in Australia facing several people smuggling charges. Another investigation focus at the present is the collection of evidence against Ali CETIN, residing in Sydney Australia, for his involvement in the above venture. Longer term aspects of the investigation will include prosecuting Muslim SERIBAN, Bayram ASLAN, and Eyup BASAR, for their involvements in people smuggling to Australia. To enable such outcomes, the assistance of Turkish and Indonesian law enforcement authorities will be important.

This document provides a basic overview of the various persons of interest within this network. Source documents for this information are retained by PSST members.

#### Overview - "Seriban" People Smuggling Network

The "Seriban" people smuggling network operates within Turkey and Indonesia, and has some Australian connections. The network is predominantly comprised of Turkish-born persons, some of whom have obtained Australian citizenship. The network also obtains significant assistance from a number of Indonesian nationals. There are a number of family connections between the Turkish born persons in this network.

Australia is the main destination country for the potential illegal immigrants (PIIs) used by this network. Based on intelligence obtained from various Australian authorities, this network is believed to be responsible for the arrival of over 250 Turkish / Kurdish illegal immigrants to Australia on 14 separate vessels from 1993 to the present.

In addition to Australia, there is intelligence which indicates that the network may have smuggled persons to Germany in the mid to late 1990,s. More recently, intelligence has been received indicating that the network is now shifting its focus to other possible destinations including Canada, New Zealand, and possibly also Korea (B2).

The cost for smuggling to Australia has ranged from \$4,000 to \$12,000 USD per person but generally averages between \$5,000 - \$7,000 USD per person. For the most recent venture (SIEV 14), the majority of the PIIs paid about \$7,500 USD each. In almost all instances, part payment would be made in Turkey to cover the cost of airline tickets to Indonesia (the transit

country used by the network) plus some initial profit gain, with the bulk of the monies to be paid after arrival in Indonesia.

#### Source Country / Recruiting

Turkey is the source country of the PIIs for this network. People of Kurdish ethnicity and of Alevi faith from the Gaziantep and Adiyaman regions of south-eastern Turkey near the Syrian border are the main targets for this network. Turks are also targeted from these regions but to a lesser extent. The PIIs are recruited through word of mouth (the network has an established reputation in the region), and also through active recruiting. Regarding the former, there were a number of locations of interest known to be frequented by the network members. These were mostly local coffee shops and sometimes local travel agencies. Any person wishing to seek out the network would go to those locations and ask the relevant questions to establish contact.

In terms of active recruiting, individual PIIs are known to be approached by members of the network and are asked to recruit a certain number of people for upcoming ventures in exchange for the waiving of their own cost of travel. At other times the network members themselves would personally travel in the region seeking clients,.

The members / smugglers known to operate in Turkey for this network include (but are not limited to) Muslim SERIBAN, Eyup BASAR, Bayram ASLAN, Hakan KARAOGU, and Murat KARAOGU. Note that both Hakan and Murat operate Karaoglu Turizm - a travel agency in Gaziantep which has an integral role in the functioning of the network as will be described shortly. Brief profiles of these people are also below.

As would be expected, part of the recruitment process involves marketing the destinations (at least for Canada and Australia). Consistent reports indicate that the network members describe favourable working and living conditions. Often the earning potential in Australia is grossly exaggerated. The network members also emphasise their previous successes to the PIIs - typically, the PIIs will be told of other people in their own town or region who have been smuggled by the network. It is normally around this time that network members also provide information relating to the immigration processes (Australia) to the PIIs and also give them some initial coaching as to what to say when they arrive in Australia to increase their success for refugee claims. They are also coached as to what to say to law enforcement officials if asked questions about the network itself (eg, told to use false names and false descriptions, told to tell officials they are tourists etc).

Once a PII decides to engage the services of this network, the smugglers would then provide them with information about how to obtain airline tickets (always return air tickets to avoid suspicion from authorities) and passports. The tickets are almost always organised by Hakan and Murat KARAOGU of the Karaoglu Turizm located in Gaziantep. Typically, the PII is quoted an inflated price for the ticket and Hakan/Murat then keep the balance as their commission,. Further details about Hakan and Murat are below.

The PIIs typically apply for their own passports prior to departing. In cases where this is not possible, the network members ask the PIIs to supply passport photographs of themselves and personal information as well as some additional cash (usually a few hundred dollars). They then use their own contacts (some reports indicate these are government officials. One witness has said this was a "high ranking" official) to obtain the passports. The passports themselves are reportedly produced and manufactured normally, and, except on a few known occasions, are generally in the correct name of the PII. As the passports are collected by the network in Indonesia or disposed of by the passengers prior to arriving at the destination country, no examples have been obtained by the PSST.

Prior to departing for Indonesia (the transit country used by this network - see next section), the PIIs are given some further basic instructions. Often this takes place at a local coffee shop or the Karaoglu Turizm travel agency. Except on a few rare occasions, each PII is told they will be met at Jakarta airport by an agent of the network. In most cases a name for this agent is provided prior to departing. In some cases, the PIIs are told that the agent will approach them. They are also instructed to pay that particular agent the remaining amount of money. These instructions are often given to small groups of PIIs and to a lesser extent on a one-on-one basis.

The PIIs typically make their own arrangements to travel to the international airport (almost always Istanbul). The PIIs often travel in small groups to Istanbul generally no more than five persons in each group. In most cases these are the same PIIs who had earlier received instructions together.

Similarly, the PIIs often travel to Indonesia in small groups at staggered times. Many PIIs have described meeting other PIIs either at the international airport, on the flight, and at Jakarta airport by chance (eg, were previously unaware of the others).

Except on rare occasions, the network members are not at the point of departure nor do they travel with the PIIs on the plane. The PIIs interviewed have indicated they travelled with either Gulf-Air, Emirates, Malaysian Airlines or Turkish Airlines. Gulf-Air appears to be preferred as it is cheaper than the others. The route is normally via a stop-over in Bahrain and/or Dubai or Abu Dhabi, then a further stop-over in either Bangkok or Singapore or Kuala Lumpur, then onto Jakarta.

There have been instances of PIIs being detained and questioned at Istanbul airport by the Istanbul Airport Police. The questioning has been in relation to their destination, at other times in relation to the smugglers. Some of the questions asked points to the Turkish authorities having some knowledge about the existence of this network. In some cases the PIIs are released, in others they have paid bribes to be released.

Transit Country Activity

Indonesia is the transit country used by this network. There are a variety of favourable conditions for the network: they have a wide range of local and Turkish-born contacts in Indonesia; labour, and infrastructure (eg, crew and vessels) is cheap; officials can be bribed; law enforcement authorities operate in silos; external and internal borders are relatively porous; and there is an absence of people smuggling legislation and therefore no Mutual Assistance / Extradition treaties (at least with Australia). Of course, Indonesia is also in close geographic proximity to Australia and New Zealand.

When the PIIs arrive in Jakarta they are met either by Mehmet SERIBAN or by an Indonesian associate after going through the customs line. Some PIIs have stated that they encountered problems with the Customs or Immigration officials by the Indonesian authorities but these were successfully resolved with a small bribe. The PIIs are then conveyed to a local hotel or pension, usually one which has been used previously by the network such as the Hotel Menteng 1 and 2 (these are discussed later in this document), for a brief stay. The PIIs are then moved to an outlying island, sometimes there are several transits to these islands. The final staging points have included Bali, Lantaka and Maumere (Flores), Kupang (Timor), Makassar (Sulawesi), to name a few. As in Jakarta, both hotels and pensions are used to accommodate the PIIs on these islands. As noted previously, the PIIs typically arrive in staggered small groups to Jakarta. These small groups gradually accrete at points along the way right up to the final departure point. The isolation of these small groups by the network is effective such that the PIIs often are not aware what their final number will be until at the point of departure.

At all times, an Indonesian assistant or two maintains vigil over each group to ensure that the PIIs do not encounter any problems. Without exception, none of the Indonesian associates used has spoken or understood Turkish. Mehmet SERIBAN himself keeps at arms length from the PIIs with only sporadic visits to the hotels/pensions. On these visits Mehmet provides further instructions about the venture and further coaching about what details to tell the authorities if detected. Likewise, it is normally during one of these visits that payment is made. In early ventures, the network often accepted payment at relatively late stages of the venture, that is, at the second or third transit point or in some cases even at the final point of departure. However, by that stage the PIIs had often spent a proportion of their dedicated smuggling monies or refused to pay the full amount until after they had arrived in Australia. Therefore, in more recent ventures the network asked for payment from the PIIs very shortly after arrival in Jakarta. In addition to ensuring they got their agreed monies this had the added effect of increasing the feelings of vulnerability in the PIIs in Indonesia and thus increased their dependence on the network. If the PIIs expressed any doubts about the venture or refused to pay they were not physically threatened. Instead, they would be subtly told they would be left to their own devices in Indonesia. Abandonment was certainly seen as a threat by the PIIs as they did not know anything about the local conditions or language, they often had already had given their passports and airline tickets to the smugglers, and they had already outlaid significant sums of monies. Unlike other networks known to operate to Australia, all the PIIs spoken to said they were never threatened with, or subject to physical violence at any stage, nor were any firearms/weapons seen.

In several instances, the PIIs were detected by Indonesian

law enforcement officials (in the "Gnowangerup" venture, the police in Kupang actually turned back the same PIIs on three occasions after arriving from Bali). There are no known examples of a venture being wholly disrupted by Indonesian law enforcement officials but there has been interference with has meant that plans were changed such as using a different departure point. There are several mentions of Indonesian law enforcement officials being bribed to either ignore the PIIs and, in some cases, to facilitate their movement.

Information from PIIs travelling on the last several most recent SIEVs, is that Mehmet SERIBAN made the arrangement for the vessels only after the PIIs had arrived or begun to arrive in Indonesia. Evidence indicates, and Mehmet SERIBAN himself has admitted, that he often used local Indonesians as interlocutors with local fishermen to make the arrangements for the fishing vessels and crew to take the PIIs to Australia. In the most recent venture (SIEV 14), Mehmet SERIBAN paid 130 million Indonesian Rupiah (roughly \$20,000 AUD) for the hiring of the vessel and four Indonesian crew members (one of which was the boat owner). Anecdotally, Indonesian crew members will try and avoid apprehension by Australian authorities. However, it is well known that if they are caught their sentence will be relatively light (typically several months for first offenders) and that conditions in Australian prisons can actually be more favourable to their own normal living conditions.

Once a vessel is arranged, the PIIs are given only short notice that they will be departing. They are then conveyed to a secluded departure location, usually a deserted stretch of beach. In some cases the vessel was at the location already but in most cases the PIIs were required to hide and wait for several hours sometimes days until the vessel arrived. The unreliability of the Indonesian crew and vessel resulted in many false starts, at the final departure point. Mehmet SERIBAN himself is sometimes at the final departure point, but more often delegates that role to an Indonesian associate. It is normally just before the PIIs are about to board the vessel that the airline tickets and passports are collected. It is likely they are not collected earlier in case the PIIs are approached by local authorities.

In all instances, the vessels used have been wooden Indonesian fishing vessels of limited size, and powered by sail and diesel engine. As expected, the food on these vessels is of poor quality (often rotten) and water is limited. Lifejackets are non-existent. Unlike some other people smuggling networks, Mehmet and others have never invested, in upgrading or reconditioning the engine or vessel. Many PIIs were led to believe, whether by design or otherwise, that they would travel on large metal-hulled ships to Australia. Understandably they were shocked when they saw their transport.

The network members take advantages of any opportunities that present themselves. In a number of ventures other well known people smugglers in Indonesia have partnered with Mehmet SERIBAN and arranged for their own PIIs to travel on vessels organised by him (eg, SIEVs "Ord", "Isa", Tabletop"). In the case of SIEV 06 ("Draco") the roles were reversed and Mehmet had in fact arranged for his PIIs to travel on a vessel organised by others.

#### Arrivals in Australia

With the exception of SIEV 14 (Melville Island) and SIEV "Draco" (Christmas Island), all vessels from this network went to Ashmore Reef which is an outlying territory of Australia in the Timor Sea - about 840 kilometers west of Darwin and 610 kilometers north of Broome. After September 2001 this reef/island system (amongst others) was excluded from Australia's migration zone by the Government as a policy response to the increasing problem of illegal boat arrivals.

The network often relied on Australian media coverage to learn of the success of their venture. Some PIIs actually contacted the network members by phone and informed them they had arrived. For example, in the "Gnowangerup" matter Mehmet stated that he was contacted by at least two of the 14 PIIs who told him not only that they had arrived, but also that they had reported him to the authorities due to the anger they felt at the "condition" of the boat and the circumstances of their voyage.

Other PIIs (particularly the "Ord" and "Warrego" SIEVs) have stated that Mehmet SERIBAN has used associates and relatives in Australia to contact them. The common theme in these phone calls is that Mehmet SERIBAN had indicated that he was poor, that things were not well in Indonesia as the Australians and Indonesians were pursuing him, and he then asked those persons if they could transfer some money to him to help them out. It appears that Mehmet believed that the PIIs owed him for the service he provided and believed he was

still on good terms with these people - a sentiment not shared by those PIIs he contacted. In March / April 2004, just before his arrest, Mehmet contacted a witness whom had been approached by the media and told them various information about Mehmet SERIBAN. On this occasion Mehmet indicated he would "settle accounts" (eg, threatened) with the witness for reporting those things in the media.

Activity of the Network Since Mehmet SERIBAN,s Arrest

In February 2004, the PSST received information that Bayram ASLAN and Muslim SERIBAN were recruiting PIIs in Gaziantep and Adiyaman for an upcoming venture (F6). In March 2004, further information was received indicating that Muslim SERIBAN was about to travel to Indonesia with a group of PIIs (C3). In April 2004, checks confirmed that Muslim SERIBAN and three Turkish nationals (identified by the PSST) had travelled to Indonesia. Their activities were monitored in Indonesia. An overt approach was eventually made by Indonesian and Australian law enforcement authorities to Muslim and the three PIIs at their hotel. They all stated they were tourists and denied any involvement in people smuggling. Within a few days they had all returned to Turkey.

Although not confirmed, PSST intelligence strongly points to Muslim SERIBAN attempting to put those three persons on a vessel being organised by another well-known smuggling group. It is believed that this vessel was bound for New Zealand.

The PSST has information that Muslim is now residing in Gaziantep. He is reported as saying that the Indonesian authorities were cracking down, on Turks in Indonesia, that he now wanted to travel to New Zealand to live and would take three or four persons with him to New Zealand to fund his own travel. It is not known how he intends to enter New Zealand. He has also mentioned sending people to Canada but has said it is difficult to send people there. These details have been provided to the relevant New Zealand and Canadian authorities.

Information obtained in late June 2004 was that an associate of Mehmet SERIBAN, Garip BUKDACI, who is living in Indonesia, together with a person called "Mahmut" (no further details), had received a number Turkish PIIs in Indonesia. These PIIs had allegedly travelled to Indonesia via Thailand. The intended destination for this nascent venture is not yet known.

PSST members were until recently in regular contact with the SIEV 14 PIIs (these persons were refused entry to Australia, later detained in Indonesia, and then deported to Turkey). These persons stated they had made a complaint to the local Adiyaman police after their attempts to get their money back from the organisers (notably Bayram ASLAN who was still in Adiyaman at the time) had been unsuccessful. In April 2004 these persons reported that Bayram ASLAN had been arrested by the local authorities as a result of their complaint. The PSST has requested details from the Turkish authorities to confirm this information as well as the nature of the charges, however, no details have yet been received. However, the PSST has obtained six copies of the statements provided by those PIIs.

In July 2004, one of the witnesses reported that Bayram ASLAN had been released on bail and had fled to Korea about one month previously. This has not been corroborated and the reliability of this witness is questionable (eg, this fact had not been mentioned in previous correspondence with the PSST).

Recent HS information arising from this investigation indicated the presence of at least two other people smuggling networks operating in Besni and Gaziantep respectively who are smuggling people to Canada. The Gaziantep network is alleged to have previously assisted in recruiting passengers for SERIBAN to send to Australia. The Besni network is alleged to have attempted to enter partnership with the SERIBANs some time ago, but they (the SERIBANs) reportedly refused. Both the Besni and Gaziantep networks are still apparently active and this information has been passed to the relevant Canadian authorities.

DATE OF REPORT: 2 AUGUST 2004  
EDELMAN